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ABSTRACT

This preliminary report sets the Folktale project, an interdisciplinary cooperative effort involving literary criticism, linguistics, the craft of translation, psychology, and statistics, in the context of reading and reading research in the modern world, and discusses experimental reader response research in Denmark as well as in other countries. It also explains why oral folktales are used as texts for the study. In order to establish patterns in readers' experiences, independent of nationality, and identify aspects and features in the literary experience, the report lists four objectives: (1) to develop methods, procedures, and means for conducting reliable cross-cultural and international studies, primarily in the field of reader response; (2) to determine the extent to which it is possible to establish "identity" between the "same" work of literature in different languages; (3) to determine aspects in the readers' experiences of narratives which are independent of the readers themselves in terms of age, sex, status, nationality, and thus to shed some light on aspects which are common to human experience of narratives; and (4) to further knowledge about the extent to which it is possible to transfer results in the field of experimental reader response research from one country to another. The report also indicates the set-up for the main data-collection to be used in the study section of the project. Three figures are included, and 15 references and an overview of the project are appended. (MS)

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A CROSS-CULTURAL, INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF LITERATURE

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Title: BACKGROUND AND PRELIMINARY PLANS FOR THE PROJECT

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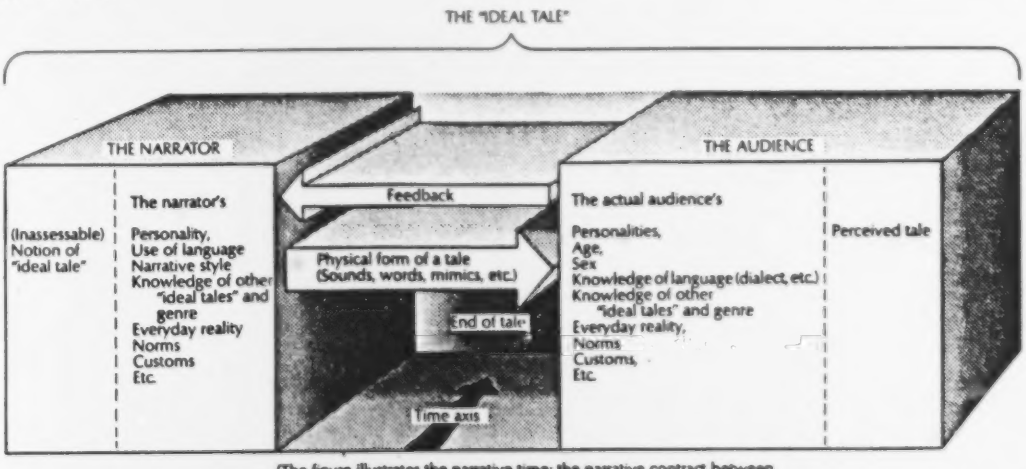

(The figure illustrates the narrative time: the narrative contract between narrator and audience and which is limited in time.)

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FOLKTALE. A CROSS-CULTURAL, INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF LITERATURE.

REPORT NO. 1
Background and Preliminary Plans for the Project

Authors: Cay Dollerup, Iven Reventlow, Carsten Rosenberg Hansen.

ABSTRACT:

The report sets the project in the context of reading and reading research in the modern world, and discusses experimental reader response research in other countries as well as in Denmark.
It then specifies the objectives of the project in terms of methodology. It explains why originally oral folktales are used as the texts for the study, which will include two languages, viz. Danish and English, both of which cover several cultures.
In addition,sketches indicate the set-up envisioned in the main data-collecting and in the general preparation of the texts to be used . (CD)

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FOREWORD

The present report is a largely informal description of the general background and the planning behind Folktale. A Cross-cultural, Interdisciplinary Study of the Experience of Literature. It reflects our discussions and gives an insight into our work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are indebted to the Unesco Participation Programme and to the Department of English, University of Copenhagen for financial and practical assistance in our work.

We also wish to express our gratitude for incisive and valuable criticism of our thinking in the initial stages from professor Elrud Ibsch and her colleagues at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

We wish to thank Annette Rasmussen for having typed the present report.

In the present report we shall first give a general outline of the background of the project in hand, "Folktale: a Cross-cultural, Interdisciplinary Study of the Experience of Literature"; and then we will sketch the way it is planned to be carried out.

The project will be conducted in Danish and English and we use texts based on authentic folktales.

I.0 General Comments

I.1 Scope

The basic and indisputable premise for this project is that texts do not exist as literature without being - or having been - experienced by a reader.

This premise is important for a number of subsequent decisions concerning the experimental set-up and for determining the limitations and the scope of the study.

We do not have to argue that in general reading is an important activity for Man. However, until the 15th century both senders and receivers were a select few (accountants, merchants, lawmakers, scholars), and even after the introduction or printing, readers remained in the minority in the population as a whole.

Things changed gradually, and by the last century reading became part of the basic instruction of the average citizen in many countries; and today the process of propagating literacy and hence the craft of reading goes on all over the world.

In due course, reading may be supplanted or superseded by other means of communication - but at present, it holds pride of place.

We choose to work with written literature. We limit ourselves to narratives (as the connotative overtones of much other literature, e.g. poems, would render it less suitable, if not downright useless, for methodologically sound reader response studies involving more than one language). And narratives exist in all cultures all over the world.

In addition, printed narratives for the many is a modern phenomenon, for even in the most "advanced" nations, most

literature was oral until the last century. By using folktales, i.e. tales which were originally oral, as the basis for our texts we can argue both that they are on a par with literature in the reading process, and yet belong to an ancient oral tradition in their origin.

In the project we operate with only two languages, namely Danish and English.

The former because it is our language, spoken in our native country; but it furthermore means that we can control and check everything that happens in the study on our own home ground.

We include English for various reasons: first, of course, our familiarity with English. But, secondly, also because of the cross-cultural scope of the study: apart from the nations where English is the native language, there are many other countries where English is used for administration and perhaps also as the language of instruction in school. Thus the use of the mother toungue in education is a recent practice in many developing countries and even so, the mother tongue is frequently tied to oral languages rather than the language of social communication in the population as a whole (cf. minutes of Unesco-meeting on the needs of bilingual and multilingual education in developing countries, 25-29 April 1983 [cited in Reading 1 (1983), no. 3 (December), 4]). Hence the use of English in the texts and questionnaires ensures that the experiment can be conducted in countries with different cultures. And it also increases the applicability of our findings immensely.

II.0 International and Danish Background and Studies

II.1 The International Background for the Study

The project described here belongs to the studies in the field of reader response research, which is ultimately inspired by I.A. Richards' Practical Criticism (1929), although some of the work done by C.W. Valentine (e.g. The Experimental Psychology of Beauty) antedates and is parallel

to it. Richards' study of authentic student comments on works of literature directly inspired others, for instance in the United States (e.g. Rosenblatt), and, notably, in Sweden (Allwood, Gunnar Hansson).

Especially after 1960 there has been a surge of interest in the field, even when we limit it to experimental studies. This is amply evidenced by the Purves survey (1972) and the annual bibliographies (in e.g. Research in the Teaching of English and the IRA bibliography by Weintraub et al.).

In the United States there are different schools, one of which is experimental, and another one with a psychoanalytic slant (Holland).

In Sweden there is a whole school around Gunnar Hansson, and studies are - or have been - undertaken in various other countries as well, such as Germany (cp. Groeben) and the Netherlands (Dick Schram).

II.2 The Danish Background

The Danish studies have a somewhat different background. They have always been interdisciplinary (especially literary criticism, psychology, and statistics). In terms of methodology they are heavily influenced by the unique Copenhagen school of phenomenological psychology whose best known representative is Edgar Rubin (1886-1951). This Copenhagen school of phenomenology developed in an interplay between Danish philosophers and psychologists from around the turn of the century to 1970, and has little in common with the phenomenologies developed from Husserl, but has a number of features in common with the "Gestalt" psychology.

In general terms, the Copenhagen school of phenomenology is based on the assumption that psychologically speaking human mental life, experiences and acts, follow regular patterns which are just as unbendable and fixed as those determining the material world. Human mental life appears chaotic only because it is so rich and depends upon a vast number of facts in the life of each individual. With care it is possible to obtain descriptions of their experiences from different individuals; and thus it is

possible to get information that can be used for determining regular patterns in human behaviour and experience.

The Danish studies in reader response that we shall describe below, as well as the study in hand, are all based on careful questioning of individual readers - a phenomenological analysis. It is undertaken by means of introspection (i.e. during the experience itself) and retrospection (after the experience proper) and it concerns the experiences characterising different readers' experiences of different texts.

And yet the Danish studies, notably the "Ram-study" and the project in hand, add a new facet to the Copenhagen school in so far as they introduce the use of questionnaires which are constructed from the data collected from the initial, time-consuming and intensive collection of introspective and retrospective, phenomenological data.

What is more: prior to the final data-collecting, the questionnaires are presented for comment to other readers in connection with their readings of the texts, so that we make sure that we get information of the same type as that we obtained from the intensive analyses. The use of questionnaires allows us to get information from so many readers that it is possible to analyse the data collected statistically. Thus it is possible to compare responses and response patterns of readers with different cultural backgrounds.

II.3 The Previous Danish Studies

The following three Danish studies in reader response are of special interest to the project in hand: "Tension", the "Ram-study", and "Fairytale":

"Tension" ((1965) 1967-74) was based on the assumption often vented in short-story theory, that short stories contain "tension", "intensity" and the like. Accordingly 43 readers reported by introspection on their experiences of this phenomenon during the reading in the initial stages of the study. However, it was stopped short of the quantitative stage, but furnished us with massive information about the reading process, as well as experimental and

methodological experience.

The "Ram-study" (1967-1985) started out with 42 readers in a series of pilot studies with introspective reports, and then proceeded to a quantitative collecting of data and analyses of more than 700 readers' experiences of the protagonist of a short story. The study was significant by demonstrating that phenomena discussed in literary criticism (here the effect of the author's technique) could be checked in a complex study. It also yielded a number of important by-products.

"Fairytale" (1978-82) which was to uncover the universal in the literary experience of fairytales, was suggested in a preliminary form by Dilek Doltas of Turkey, and taken up as an interesting challenge and logical next step in the context of the Danish studies. The Danish team was in charge of the methodological and practical set-up which turned out to be practicable, and led to the construction of preliminary questionnaires in Denmark. Unfortunately the study could not be carried through to a successful conclusion. (The studies are described in more detail in Dollerup, Reventlow, Rosenberg Hansen, 1984).

III.0 The Actual Project: Folktale

III.1 Objectives

"Folktale. A Cross-cultural, Interdisciplinary Study of the Experience of Literature" is indebted to the above studies; it is to be conducted in two fairly closely related languages, viz. Danish and English; and in an interdisciplinary cooperation involving literary criticism, linguistics, the craft of translation, psychology, and statistics.

Within the general framework outlined on the previous pages, its objectives are:

A. To develop methods, procedures, and means for conducting reliable cross-cultural and international studies, primarily in the field of reader response, but with ramifications into related field, e.g. criticism, psychology,

and sociology.

B. To determine the extent to which it is possible to establish "identity" between the "same" work of literature in different languages - a problem for translation criticism, and hence pertinent to most international comparative work.

C. To determine aspects in the readers' experiences of narratives which are independent of the readers in terms of e.g. age, sex, status, nationality (and vice versa), and thus to shed some light on aspects which are common to human experience of narratives.

D. With the reservations implied in points A, B, and C, also to further knowledge about the extent to which it is possible to transfer results in the field of experimental reader response research from one country to another - a point of prime interest to the teaching of literature as well as reading - and to some extent, literary criticism.

III.2 The General Plan for the Whole Study

In order to set up a practicable and viable project which can be carried out successfully, it must comprise the following items and stages - which will be treated in more detail in subsequent reports:

1. A preliminary selection of potentially suitable texts from different cultures. This selection is undertaken by us prior to any experimental studies.

2. A study which identifies the texts which are best suited for use in the main project. The selection is done by having readers write retrospective essays on the texts chosen in stage 1. The readers' responses are then analysed and the texts which elicited the greatest range of legitimate responses will be used for the future work.

3. The texts are translated into English, and collated with the Danish ones with a concurrent linguistic revision and check to make sure that the texts are as "identical as humanly possible" in the two languages.

4. Readers' responses in spontaneous introspection

studies during the reading, and retrospective reports (essays) after the reading. These studies are conducted in both the Danish-speaking world and the English-speaking world.

5. The construction of questionnaires on aspects of the readers' experiences. They must operate or function in "identical" ways in both the Danish-speaking and English-speaking worlds and are developed from readers' responses in stage 4.

6. Checks on these questionnaires in translation; and introspection reports by readers in order to make sure that they are as "identical as possible" by means of a traditional linguistic revision.

7. The construction of a questionnaire on the readers' backgrounds and personalities by means of introspection (oral and in writing).

8. Setting up a model for describing groups of readers in different countries/cultures in terms of common features in these groups.

9. The main data collecting.

It must be kept in mind that the study is concerned with establishing patterns in the readers' experiences, independent of nationality. Accordingly, we must - with the exception of a few important points which we shall touch upon below - steer clear of any one specific literary theory: what we can do - and undoubtedly will do - is to identify aspects and features in the literary experiences which connect with literary criticism and theory. But to choose one specific critical theory as our premise would constitute an undesirable, and possibly disastrous, limitation on the project from the very outset, with the psychological methodology we have chosen (cp. above, section II.2 [pp. 7-8]).

III.3 A Sketch of the Plans for the Set-up in the Main Data Collecting

In accordance with the plans we used in part in "Tension", carried out successfully in the "Ram-study", and tested in a preliminary form in "Fairytale" in Denmark, we expect

the data-collecting in the major part of the study to take place as shown in figure 1; it illustrates the order in which the individual reader will meet with the three texts and questionnaires in the main study:

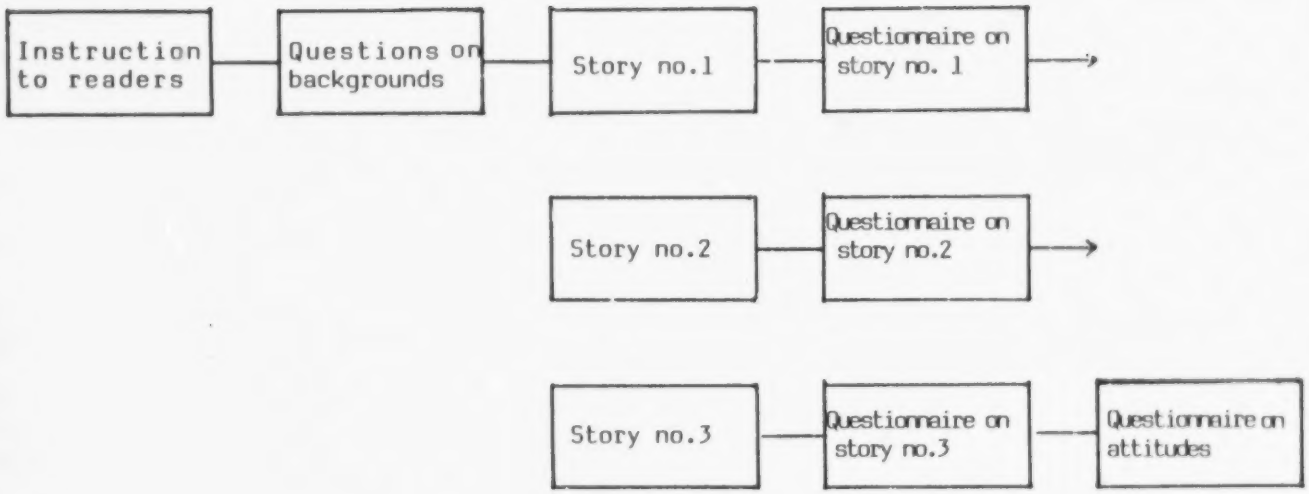

FIGURE 1:'Design for main data-collecting with three texts. There are six combinations and all readers read all three texts (1,2,3 - 1,3,2 - 2,1,3 - 2,3,1 - 3,1,2 - 3,2,1).

Folklore, Report 13.

The figure shows a rotation design where we have three texts and three questionnaires, one per text. At the very beginning, the readers are instructed what to do.

In the diagramme, there are two questionnaires on the readers' backgrounds and attitudes, respectively.

Without going into specifics, we think at present that this information must be obtained at two different stages, dependent on the nature of the data we want to get.

We believe that it is sensible to try to get all the non-controversial background information about readers at the very beginning, and we have in mind questions about the reader's age, sex, hobbies, reading habits and the like.

On the other hand, we believe that we should not introduce questions which some readers might feel they should keep at the back of their minds while reading the stories, until the reading is over, and after the experience has been charted. The information in question may be controversial in some cultures, e.g. attitudes to girls/boys, to animals, and the like. And information where we attempt to chart differences - or similarities - in the individual reader's experience of the three stories they read, must of course also be obtained at the end.

Despite these comments, we foresee that there may be a different problem: perhaps we are too optimistic in assuming that readers can cope with three texts - and, if so, we must use the diagramme illustrated in figure 2.

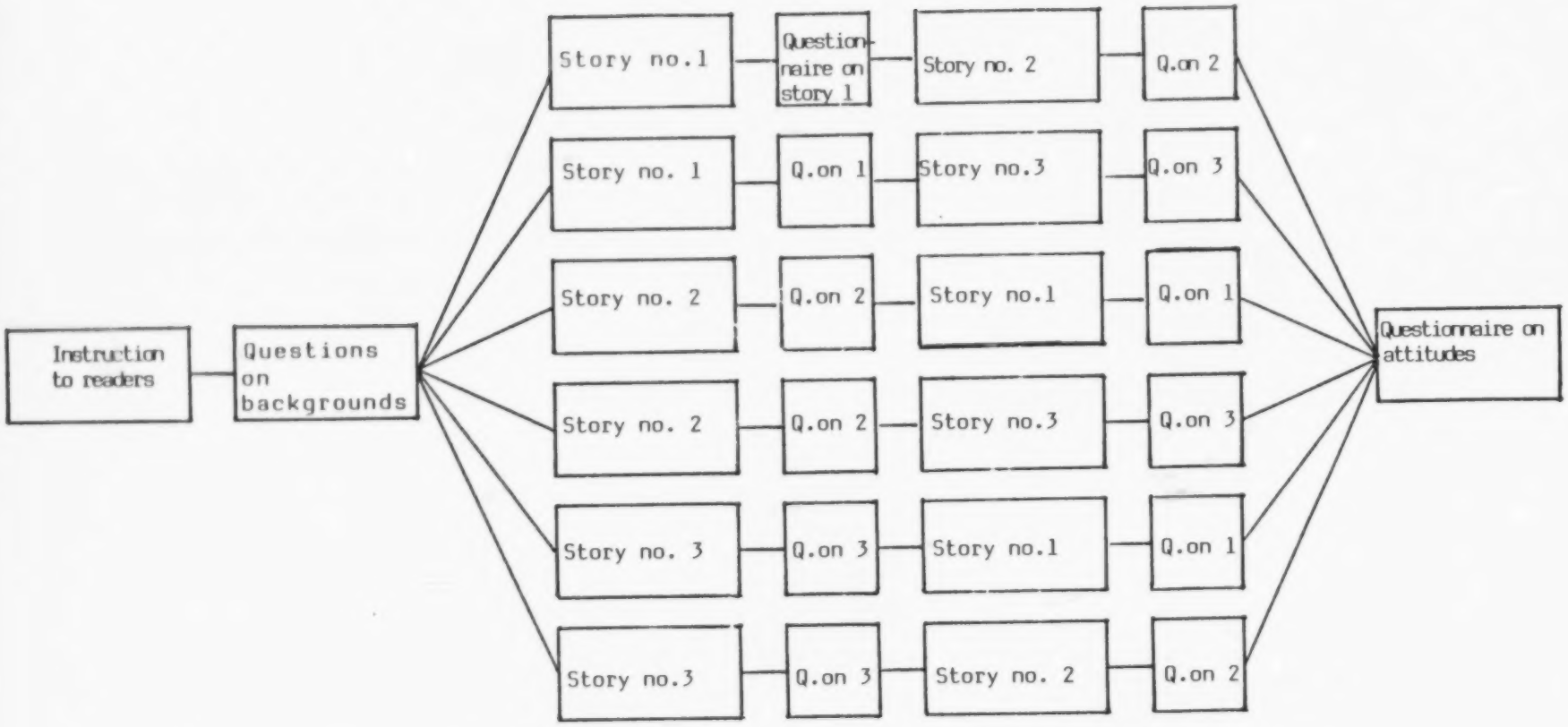

FIGURE 2. Design for main data collecting with two texts, both of which are read by all participants.

It is readily appreciated that if we want the same number of readings of each text in the last design as we do in the design shown previously, the number of readers increases.

At all events, we merely wish to stress that the plans are preliminary ones, in which we try to foresee some problems that may, perhaps, not materialise.

III.3.1 The Texts

In "Tension" and "Ram 1 investigation" we used literary texts by well-known authors; however, transference of such texts to another language presents special problems for experimental studies, because the original texts are protected by international "droit moral", at least in principle.

"Fairytale" used fairytales, a heterogeneous and ill-defined group of narratives, which is furthermore limited to certain parts of the world. On the other hand these texts had considerable advantages in terms of translation thanks to the fluid character of folk narratives.

A logical choice for "Folktale" is therefore to disregard the limitations of genre, and then just choose folktales from different cultures for our purposes (including, of course, fairytales).

So the choice of texts for "Folktale" is, then, determined by the following facts:

1. Folktales, oral narratives, have existed long before written literature, and still exist in many non-literate societies in the present-day world.

2. As we disregard "literary tales" and stick to tales told by competent narrators in a given culture, namely those termed "active" narrators (often with large repertories), there is a fair chance that we will get stories that were considered "good" in their "original" surroundings. In addition, these narrators have not been influenced much by trends outside their own culture - unlike many "literary" authors.

3. The bond with a culture is ensured by the very storytelling event: the story comes to exist when there is a dynamic interplay between a narrator and an audience with the same cultural background. The cultural identity of the narrative is reinforced by this interplay, which we have argued constitutes a unique and unrepeatable event - an

"ideal tale" - every time it takes place in a so-called narrative contract between audience and narrator (see Dollerup, Holbek, Reventlow, Rosenberg Hansen).

4. And finally - in apparent contradiction with what we have just stated: narratives, folktales are often viewed as a common heritage in specific - sometimes even all - cultures, and as such we can argue that - like any story-teller in a chain - we may change a tale as well, specifically in terms of

a) features that jar with modern readers, because this is on a par with "der Präventivzensur der Gesellschaft" in the narrative contact, and

b) things that cannot be rendered in the two languages can be substituted so that the texts in Danish and English become closer to one another.

We have pointed out in the work just cited, that the original narrative contract, constituting the story-telling event, cannot be reconstituted.

In the moment of recording, and in subsequent transfers in space, time, and medium, a folktale passes through "filters". Hence, in dealing with folktales in writing we are dealing with a different entity than oral folktale, namely, an artefact, which is, to all intents and purposes, no different from "ordinary literature". If there is any - and our only yardstick for assessing it is a comparison with the introspection studies in "Tension" and in "Fairy-tale" - it is a weakened awareness of the sender/author in the readers' recreation.

What is more to the point in our context is that in passing through the filters, the folktales we use, are prised loose from their original cultural context. However, we have argued in the work just quoted, even the recording is one filter, and what is more: it is possible to describe the filters, once we are fully aware of them - and that we intend to do.

The most important points are, then, that in choosing folktales, we are picking a kind of literature which is - from one angle - malleable: and, from another one - the carrier of certain personal, societal, and cultural norms.

III.3.1.1 The Texts in the Project

We plan to use no more than three tales in the main data collecting, for the simple reasons that they can probably cover a fairly wide spectrum and yet be practicable in terms of the amount of reading we may expect volunteers to do in one session.

The tales must be from different cultures. They should originally have been told by competent narrators. They should be passably authentic, i.e. recorded by, or at the very least approved of, by an authority on folktale collecting in the country in question.

In "Fairytale" we used a procedure in which we first selected three tales which had something, e.g. national backgrounds, in common, and then had readers comment on them in writing by retrospection. The one tale in each group which elicited the most facetted response was then used for the study in its subsequent stages. The procedure worked very well.

A. The modernisation and treatment of the Danish group of tales in "Fairytale" had been described in detail. Therefore these tales were taken over the way they appeared and with the responses they elicited in the selection round with essay responses (as described in Stage 2 page 10 above). They were representative of Danish agrarian culture towards the end of the last century.

B. The Turkish texts used in "Fairytale" were good, and in the present context they represent a largely Islamic culture. Accordingly they represent the second culture. They were, however, translated poorly in "Fairytale"; and for "Folktale" they were therefore taken over directly in 1983/II from the collection of Pertev Boratav in which they were printed.

C. For the third culture, and group of folktales, we discussed the authenticity of tales recorded in various cultures with specialists, and concluded that the most reliable recordings available to us were Inuit tales, represented by a collection of tales from Thule in Greenland from the 1930ies. This also had the added advantage that we could cover two cultures within the Danish-speaking

area, as Danish is used extensively in Greenland as a second language.

We shall return to the tales selected in a subsequent report, but in order to give some idea of the treatment of the texts, we illustrate the treatment and use of the Danish text in the first stages (1-4) in the project as planned, in figure 3:

FIGURE 3: The treatment of the texts in Stages 1-4

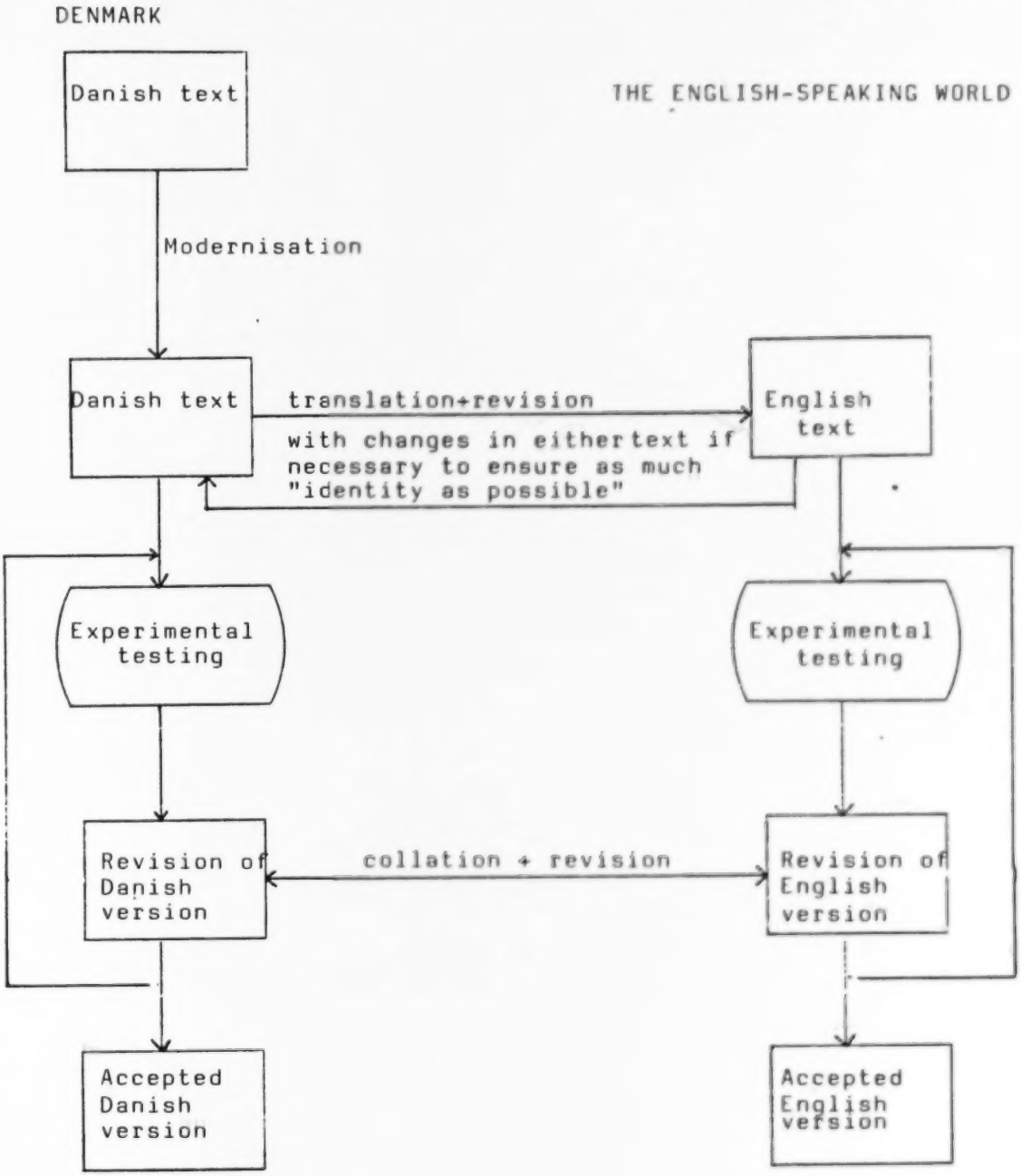

FIGURE 3: An illustration of the way we (may have to) deal with the texts with the Danish text as an example.
The old story is modernised slightly in lingustic terms for the selection study. In the translation process, a simultaneous revision takes place, and in order to ensure as much "content identity" as possible, the Danish text may have to be changed in a "filter". On the next stage we must (also) check experimentally that the texts are as "identical as possible" or have them changed.

III.3.1.2 The Questionnaire

The above diagramme also illustrates what we have hinted before: in our investigations there is an interplay between the readers' responses in the initial pilot rounds and the questions to answer later on in a questionnaire: the questionnaire is based on authentic statements about the reading. The method ensures that questions are unambiguous, and that they are understood in the same way by us - as well as the readers who answer them.

There are, of course, other specific reasons for picking a questionnaire: in the first place it is a very practical way in which we can obtain information which is comparable cross-culturally. Secondly, Hansson and his pupils have found almost identical experiences of literature in groups of readers where one would not normally assume that this was the case, e.g. between workers and professional critics (e.g. Fredholm). The point in these findings is not that less articulate readers are on a par with professional critics when they talk about literature. But the fact is that their experiences are almost as full - when charted, as it were, from outside.

In our case, then, this is of prime importance: to bridge cultures we must accept that the linguistic links - the texts and the questionnaires - will undoubtedly be received at different levels of understanding at the passive, and purely linguistic level. To add active mastery of English to the list of demands would be unwise.

III.3.1.3 The Readers

The choice of the actual readers must to some extent be determined by availability and access.

Within the Danish-speaking area, we expect to establish our core-group of readers, i.e. at least 800 18-year-olds from Danish gymnasia (corresponding to "lycée","Hochschule", "A-level", and "senior high school"). They will make out our main anchor.

In Denmark proper we expect to tag on other Danish groups of readers with different educational backgrounds, e.g. old-age pensioners. It goes without saying, that the larger the group, the more detailed and valid our conclusions - but there can never be less than 50 readers in a group.

In Greenland, within the Inuit culture, we include a group of readers with Danish as a foreign language.

In the English-speaking world, we shall identify and include different groups. One particularly obvious choice would be representatives of the Inuit culture in e.g. Canada, but we prefer to make no approaches until the experiment proper can be carried out financially, and especially as long as the texts to be used have not been identified, it may turn out that the texts chosen simply cannot be checked out in certain cultures because they touch on taboos.

In the preliminary round, where we are after readers' responses for the questionnaire, it stands to reason that these readers, too, must represent as many different cultures as possible. But there is no reason for them to be identical with the ones actually used in the main experiment.

The readers are defined as as follows in the main experiment:

a. <u>as groups</u> by means of a generalised description of each group which charts major cultural differences (i.e. age, place of living, living conditions and the like), and

b. <u>as individuals</u> by means of an individualised questionnaire giving information about the individual reader. This questionnaire will contain both questions about the individual reader's social background as well as questions that indicate some psychological features.

One point to be borne in mind is, of course, that today the whole idea of a "pure" culture is suspect, as most countries are developing along the lines of the Western world. And to this we add the demand that those who participate - outside the countries where Danish and English are the mother tongues - are fluent readers of Danish and English as a foreign language. The latter point inevitably means that our readers will not be "pure" in terms of culture.

We must therefore - at least initially - assume that what we eventually come to consider as fairly "cross-cultural" must in some cases also be affected by Western ideas. In other words: the very fact that one language is used in different cultures, also contributes to more uniformity between different cultures.

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Questionnaire on background variables (Stage 7): first version discussed, written out and printed: 84/II

Danish texts (Stages 1 and 2): three stories selected from a larger group of stories by us; slightly modernised; read by readers; responses analysed, and the best text identified: 79/II and 80/I. Language modernised in Danish: 83/I+II.

Turkish texts (Stage 1): three stories selected by us from a larger group: 79/II. Translated and typed: 84/I. Read by readers: 84/I.

Greenlandic texts (Stage 1): selected by us: 83/I. Translated: 83/II. Read by readers: 84/I.

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